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## Grand Canyon News Release

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### **Finding of No Significant Impact signed for rehabilitation of Hermit Road**

**Grand Canyon, Ariz.** – A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was signed yesterday by Michael D. Snyder, Regional Director for Intermountain Region of the National Park Service for the rehabilitation of the seven-mile long, historic Hermit Road, located between Grand Canyon Village and Hermits Rest on the South Rim of Grand Canyon National Park.

The Regional Director concluded that implementation of the preferred alternative for rehabilitating the road does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment and is not an action that normally requires preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS).

In September 2006 the National Park Service (NPS) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Rehabilitation of Hermit Road. This EA, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, analyzed the impacts that will likely result from implementation of the project. The Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluated three alternatives for addressing the purpose and need for action. The EA also evaluated taking only minimal action (Alternative A, No Action) to address critical safety concerns for comparison with the action alternatives. The EA further evaluated a management option (temporal road closure) to close Hermit Road periodically to all motor vehicles, an option that could be applied to any alternative. The EA was available for a 30-day public comment period. Public comments that were received were used in preparation of the FONSI.

Actions under the preferred alternative include widening and resurfacing Hermit Road, improving existing trails, overlooks and parking areas, and constructing a multi-modal greenway trail in a portion of the project area. The preferred alternative also includes the experimental implementation of a daily closure to all motor vehicles on a portion of Hermit Road. To encourage pedestrian and bicycle use in a vehicle-free environment, the NPS will test a daily morning closure of the road to vehicles, once rehabilitation is complete. The exact dates and times of this temporal road closure have not yet been determined.

Funding for the project will predominately come from the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act program (park entrance fees). Additional funds will also be provided from the Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands Program and the Federal Lands Highway Program.

Road construction will occur from April – November 2008 and will be from west to east, starting at Hermits Rest. The road section from west of Mohave Point to Hermits Rest will be completely closed during the construction period, with the exception of providing very limited morning shuttle bus access for overnight backcountry permit holders only to the Hermit Trailhead during April, May, September, October and November. The section of road from the Hermit Road Interchange in Grand Canyon Village to Mohave Point will remain open during construction of the western half of the road. Work on this section will begin after the July 4 holiday weekend. The west end of the road will be closed to visitors during the entire construction period; the east end of the road will be closed to visitors from early July through November. Shuttle buses and tour buses will not operate on the west end for the entire duration, but will be allowed on the eastern part of the road up until early July. Portions of the rim trail will be open to correspond with road closures. This closure scenario will speed up the construction allowing for the work to be completed in approximately eight months, dependent on weather conditions.

Access to the Hermit Trailhead will be limited during the construction period. Visitors with overnight permits for backcountry areas accessed by the Hermit Trail will only be allowed access to the trailhead in April, May, September, October and November. During these months, access to the trailhead will be limited to two, early morning shuttle buses for those with backcountry permits only. Backcountry permit holders will only be allowed to hike down the Hermit Trail

during these months and will not be allowed to hike out at the Hermit Trailhead; this will restrict use of the Hermit Trailhead to one-way loop hikers. Hikers during these months, using a morning shuttle, will be allowed to hike in via the Hermit Trailhead but will be required to hike out the Bright Angel Trail or Bass Trails. No access will be provided to or from the Hermit Trailhead during June, July or August during the construction period. Backcountry permit applicants will be informed of these temporary restrictions by the Backcountry Information Center prior to being issued their permits.

Due to the length of the construction period and its impact on the current use of the road, concessioner-operated bus tours and park shuttle bus operations on Hermit Road will need to be temporarily modified to provide a level of replacement service for visitors that are displaced. Tour buses will continue to have access up to Mohave Point from April through early July. During this time and then when the road is completely closed, substitute tours will be accommodated in other areas of the South Rim. Tour passengers will be notified of these temporary changes during the 2008 construction period by tour operators well in advance of making their tour reservations.

From April through early July during the construction period, park-provided free shuttle buses will continue to access their normal route on Hermit Road up to and including Mohave Point. Increased service will also be provided on the shuttle route from the visitor center, Canyon View Information Plaza, to the South Kaibab Trailhead and Yaki Point. From early July to November, a new shuttle bus route from CVIP to Desert View will be implemented. This route will stop at Grandview, Tusayan Ruins and Desert View. Moran Point may also be used as a stop.

All those that commented on the September 2006 Environmental Assessment will be receiving a printed copy of the FONSI. Those interested in viewing the FONSI, may do so on the National Park Service Planning, Environment and Public Comment website at (<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca>). For questions and additional information about this project please contact Debbie Lutch, Project Planning Lead at (928) 774-0095 or Vicky Stinson, Project Manager at (928) 774-3026.

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